

# AbstinenceNews

NEBRASKA ABSTINENCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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## Talking With Your Kids About Sex and Relationships

**P**arents are the best line of defense when it comes to protecting teens against harmful consequences of risky behavior. Most parents want to do their best in talking with their kids about sex and sexuality, but are often not sure how to begin. Remember, the more open and honest communication you have with your teen, the more likely they are to come back to you for information. Here are some helpful tips to get you started:

### *Explore your own attitudes*

It's okay to feel uncomfortable. But studies show that kids who feel they can talk with their parents about sex — because their moms and dads speak openly and listen carefully to them — are less likely to engage in high-risk behavior as teens.



### *Start early*

Teaching your children about sex demands a gentle, continuous flow of information that should begin early. Add accurate, age-appropriate materials gradually as your child grows.

### *Take the initiative and keep the door open*

If your child hasn't started asking questions about sex, look for a good opportunity to bring it up. Look for teachable moments. Family television viewing time or listening to teen music together can provide opportunities for valuable discussions.

### *Talk about more than the "Birds and the Bees"*

While children need to know the biological facts about sex, they also need to understand that sexual relationships involve caring, concern and responsibility. By discussing the emotional aspect of a sexual relationship with teens, they will be better informed to make decisions later on and to resist peer pressure.

### *Communicate your values*

It's your responsibility to let your children know your values about sex. Parental values related to sexual activity gives teens the "anchor" they need as they become more independent. They'll remember your values as they struggle to figure out how they should feel and behave.

### *Show them what good, responsible relationships look like*

Your teen will be as influenced by what you do as by what you say.

Adapted from: *Talking With Kids About Tough Issues*: a national campaign by [Children Now](#) and the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)



It's life control!

# Abstinence

Nebraska Abstinence Education Program

# Challenge: Reaching Parents

**C**onnecting with parents for the purpose of providing information and education about preventing risky teen behavior can be more challenging than expected. Parents have a number of competing demands on their time and attention. Parents also hold varying levels of awareness and concern about teen risk behavior, especially teen sexual activity.

## Try These Strategies

### Go Where The Parents Are

If parents don't come to a program, the program must go to them. Going to places where parents *already* tend to congregate, such as churches, schools—even non-traditional places like barber shops—is one effective strategy.

### Spread The Word Through Many Channels

Of course, many parents may not get involved in programs designed for them simply because they do

not know the program exists. But letting parents know about the availability of your program is easier said than

done—it takes time and reactivity. As marketers say, it takes multiple exposures to a product before someone buys it. Using a range of outlets—from the media, health fairs, to children's sporting events and other community programs—increases the likelihood of connecting with parents.



## Have Parents Recruit Parents

Asking parents who are already involved in a program to help draw others in can work well. Asking parents what they want and giving it to them will make them fans of the program and lead to them spreading the word to other parents. This is a great way to expand your parent base. Have parents enlist participation through activities relevant to your program plans and/or goals.

- involve participants in community mapping—community residents themselves gathering data about their own community's beliefs, norms, and practices
- ask parents to act as “walkers and talkers”/peer educators—community volunteers who speak to other residents in their communities about the importance of adults talking with teens about sexuality and of sharing accurate information with teens
- have parents host home health parties—a sort of sexual health Tupperware party designed to educate parents and adults about sexual issues and to help them understand the importance of communicating with their children and other adolescents in the community about sex and related issues.

## Don't Forget the Dads

In their efforts to engage parents, program leaders should keep in mind that reaching dads is important, too. While studies have shown that both parents can influence teens' decisions about sex, fathers may be particularly well suited to model good behavior for and talk with boys. Still, few programs focused on preventing teen pregnancy target fathers because they assume they either are not available or not interested. Such assumptions may discourage those fathers who would like to become involved in a program from doing so. Outreach strategies should target places men tend to frequent, such as sporting events and gyms.



Adapted from: *Terms of Engagement: How to Involve Parents in Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*. Authored by Karen Troccoli and published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2006



# Challenge: Motivating Parents To Participate In Programs

**E**ven parents who may be familiar with a program and inclined to support it may hesitate to get involved. Barriers to participating in parent programs range from logistical challenges, such as transportation and time demands, to skepticism about whether the program can really deliver what it promises.

## Try These Strategies

### Use Incentives

Some programs use incentives—both financial and otherwise—to entice parents to participate and/or to sustain their involvement. Holding raffles at parent events, providing hot meals, transportation, and child care are some examples of incentives. Some programs offer stipends to increase participation in program



evaluation. One example is *Parents Matter!* which pays parents each time a parent participates in the program assessment. Of course, there are incentives for parents to partic-

ipate that go beyond the financial. For example, many programs leaders say that getting parents involved in the planning of a program serves as a real motivator for them to attend and stay active. By asking parents directly what they hope to learn and accomplish, programs are more likely to secure their involvement.

### Remember How Persuasive Kids Can Be

Parents interact with other parents when they congregate at child-focused activities. The decision by parents about whether to attend a particular event is often driven largely by their own child's interests. With this in mind, programs sometimes enlist the children they serve to be ambassadors to their parents. By hosting events such as fairs or picnics, which children will want to attend, they can count on parents coming as well. A potential additional benefit is reaching even

more kids. Other programs capitalize on the likelihood that parents will attend activities in which their children are participating. One example might be a “Family Night Out” event where student participants make presentations to their parents showcasing the volunteer activities they completed.

### Logistics, Logistics, Logistics

Even the most well-intentioned programs will go underutilized if they are not easily accessible to parents. Indeed, logistical barriers—such as transportation, childcare, and work conflicts—can undermine all other efforts to draw parents into programs. To reduce those barriers, programs can take steps to offer child care, ensure the program is offered at times that do not conflict with work hours, such as evenings and weekends, and make sure the location is accessible by public transportation even if that means changing meeting sites.

Adapted from: *Terms of Engagement: How to Involve Parents in Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, Authored by Karen Troccoli and published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2006



# Parental Influence and Teens' Decisions About Sex:

## *What Every Parent Should Know*

**Relationships:** Overall closeness between parents and their children matters. Teens who are close to their parents and feel supported by them are more likely to postpone sex, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception more consistently.



**Conversations:** It's more than "the talk." Parents need to discuss sex, love and relationships with their children in candid and clear ways. Parents should not be reluctant to take a stand on these issues and clearly express that avoiding pregnancy and parenting as a teen is in everyone's best interest.

**Attitudes and Values:** Teens whose parents are clear about the value of abstinence and/or the dangers of unprotected sex, are more likely to delay having sex and to use contraception when they do become sexually active.



**Supervision:** Teens whose parents supervise them, though not too strictly, have sex at later ages, have fewer sexual partners, and are less likely to get pregnant.

**Peers:** When it comes to teens' decisions about sex, parents overestimate the influence peers have on their children and underestimate their own influence. Teens consistently say that parents matter most.

**Family structure:** Teens in single parent families, who have older siblings who are sexually active or are parents, who grow up in abusive families, and those who live in poverty, are at greater risk for teen pregnancy.



**Awareness:** Many parents are simply not aware that their children have had sex. For example, only about one third of parents of sexually experienced 14-year-olds believe that their child has had sex.

**Dating:** Parents should keep in mind that two of the most powerful risk factors for early sex and pregnancy are close romantic attachments and age differences between partners of two years or more.

*Adapted from: Terms of Engagement: How to Involve Parents in Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Authored by Karen Troccoli and published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2006*





# We're up to a little "monkey business"

**N**ebbraska Partnerships for Positive Youth Development, a statewide initiative of people and organizations dedicated to the health and well-being of Nebraska youth, has embarked on a statewide project and we want *you* to participate!

We have been conducting a statewide assessment on a web-based survey tool called **SurveyMonkey**. The information collected from the survey will be used to



connect people with one another and help strengthen our efforts in giving youth the fundamental resources they need to reach their full potential.

**Thanks!**, if you've already sent in your information.  
If not, there is still time to complete the questionnaire.

## TAKE THESE STEPS TODAY!

Complete the questionnaire by clicking on this link:  
[www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Erjod8k6bvOjffloq6\\_2fSfA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Erjod8k6bvOjffloq6_2fSfA_3d_3d)

Forward this message on through your distribution lists and listservs, post on web sites and share with colleagues.

SurveyMonkey results will:

- Offer statewide mapping and centralized database of youth services and resources
- Identify opportunities for local and regional partnerships.
- Reduce duplication of services and stretch program dollars.
- Identify areas of strength and gaps in services.

**Questions?** Contact Linda Henningsen, Adolescent Health Coordinator, NE Department of Health and Human Services at: [linda.henningsen@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:linda.henningsen@dhhs.ne.gov)

**Can't get the link to work?** Try copying and pasting the link into your browser or contact Linda for assistance.

Want more info on **Nebraska Partnerships for Positive Youth Development**? Go to:  
[www.dhhs.ne.gov/hew/fah/PositiveYouthDevelopment](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/hew/fah/PositiveYouthDevelopment)

# Flashing Yellow Lights

*Warning signs your teen may be in trouble.*

**R**esearch on teen sexual behavior shows that teens often have a number of predictors that will signify that they are on the way to premarital sexual activity.



One of the highest indicators is the use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco. Many youth surveys show that the use of tobacco is the pre-cursor to using other drugs or alcohol.

Teens who are struggling with the pain of substance abuse at home come to school burdened and stressed, and are often unable to concentrate on their work. If a family is dealing with substance abuse issues, it is necessary that the person who is addicted to the behavior and the entire family get help. Family attitude toward these issues definitely affects how a teen views these risk behaviors. Seek help immediately through a community program, medical center, or church so that further damage can be prevented.

If you as a family are not struggling with these issues, it is very important to make your teen aware of the role drugs, alcohol, inhalants, and tobacco play in teen sexual activity. There are other risk factors that play into early sexual activity, such as not feeling connected to school, work, or the world at large. Adolescence is a time of trying to figure life's issues out.

*If you think or know that your teen is already sexually active, consider these helpful and rational ideas to take the next step in communicating with your teenager about changing behavior:*

- Think before you react.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Put the emphasis on the big picture.
- Don't tear down your teenager's sense of worth.
- Stress the importance of new beginnings.
- Get medical input.
- Be prepared to take action.

Adapted from About.com:Parenting Teens at  
<http://parentingteens.about.com/od/teenpregprev/>



# Ingredients of Abstinence Education:

*A recipe for the health and well being of Nebraska youth*

**T**here are eight ingredients to an effective abstinence until marriage program. The ingredients are often referred to as “the eight elements” of abstinence education. They are included in the original federal legislation that provides for abstinence education funding to states.

State abstinence programs incorporate all eight elements into program plans when providing abstinence until marriage education to youth. By applying these elements or ingredients program providers give youth a recipe to follow that insures a path to healthy adulthood. This is the third in a series examining two of the eight elements and why they are important for youth.



**Element E:** *“Teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.”*

## What it means:

- Harmful psychological effects can be experienced such as depression and relationship failure, especially if sexual intimacy was experienced before marriage.
- Abstinence increases the freedom to fulfill age-appropriate, psychosocial, developmental stages.
- Sexual activity outside of marriage is associated with decreased school completion, educational attainment and income potential.
- Teens who are sexually active are also more likely to engage in other risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, violence and crime.

**Element F:** *“Teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child’s parents, and society.”*

## What it means:

- Marriage greatly increases the well-being of children.
- A healthy marriage significantly decreases the likelihood that one’s children will experience abuse, welfare dependence, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, emotional and behavioral problems, academic failure and incarceration.
- A healthy marriage is associated with increased life span, higher standards of living and higher levels of sexual satisfaction.
- Bearing children out-of-wedlock increases the likelihood that a mother will live in poverty, become dependent on welfare and/or experience significant delays in achieving desired life goals.
- Bearing children out-of-wedlock is associated with increased rates of depression, domestic violence and failed relationships.

# Abstinence Save Sex Until Marriage



Abstinence News is published periodically by the Nebraska Abstinence Education Program and sponsored by the Nebraska Department Health and Human Services

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*It's life control.*  
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